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Subject: The Right Use of Retrospection.

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PREACHED BY

HENRY WARD BEECHER.



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THE RIGHT USE OF RETROSPECTION.

“Jesus said unto him, Follow me; and let the dead bury their dead.”—
MATT. viii. 22.

No man can interpret the instruction of Jesus, who inclines to a literal and material view of life or of duty. As he claimed to be divine, so there is this incidental evidence of it: that his mind moved in the higher realm of thought, and that, though it touched the earth, as it were, it never materialized itself. He who attempts to put a literal construction even upon the advocacy, or the ethics, of common morals as they came from the lips of Christ, not only commits an indiscretion, but goes far to overthrow the whole truth which he endeavored to teach. His teaching, instead of being simply literal, is full of projections, full of figures, full of surprises. What could be more surprising than for him to stand by the side of the Syrophenician woman who asked him to heal her daughter, and tell her, to her face, and in the presence of a sympathizing crowd, that he came to save the lost sheep of the house of Israel. Only think of Jesus who came to advocate the universality of God's government, and who taught that the whole human race were God's children—only think of him as standing apparently on the prejudices of the Jews, and refusing to heal this woman's daughter because she was not a Jew!

Take this other case, where one came to him, and said, “I will follow thee; but suffer me first to go and bury my father.” As we read it in another gospel, Jesus said to him, “Follow thou me now,” and he said, “Suffer me first to go and bury my father.” The reply was (and it strikes one as inhuman, at first), “Let the dead bury their dead: follow thou me.”

Does religion require that a man shall forget his father and his mother? Does religion turn a man's heart into gall, so that he

hates his father and mother, as you would suppose some men to think by their interpretations of certain passages of Scripture? Is there anything more sacred than the grief of a son whose father is dead? Is there anything more certainly a duty, in the estimation of all persons of reason, and honor, and justice, and gratitude, than to pay the last rites of respect at the burial of one's father? And yet, our Master stood by the side of this young man who proposed to follow him, but who first would go and bury his father, and said, "No; follow me now. Let the dead bury their dead." But when you come to look a little more closely at it, there is nothing inharmonious, and nothing that shocks, in it. For our Savior came to set men upon a higher level of life. He came to renovate their purposes, to exalt their ambitions into the spiritual realm; and he was interpreted by the whole generation, at that time, to mean that he was about to establish an outward commonwealth. Men thought they saw the shining of the banner of a victorious army. They imagined that the way was full of palaces, and wealth, and pleasure, and banqueting, and national triumph, and the augmentation of those joys which spring from men's carnal nature: it was these things that they saw; and they crowded around the Lord Jesus, saying, "I will go with you." There were enough who were ready to be his treasurer, and secretary of state, and generals, and lieutenants, and everything of that kind; but when our Master said, "My kingdom is not of this world: my kingdom is founded in peace, purity, justice, truth and love, and my command to every one who follows me is, "Take up your cross and follow me"—that is, "Imitate me; deny and overcome selfishness, and the whole underpower of carnal life, and rise to the sphere of ennobled and consecrated thoughts, and come after me;" then the young man said, "I will; but just let me go home first, and bury my father." What was there in this that was wrong? Why he took the occasion of his father's burial as an excuse for getting rid of performing his duty towards God. It was a pretense. It was a fraud. And as he stood thus excusing himself from the most sacred duty of following Christ, the reply to him, "Let the dead bury their dead: follow thou me," was eminently fitting. Christ saw through the disguise, and answered, not as in ordinary circumstances he would have answered, and not as it strikes you and me he should have answered, but according to the state of mind which he discerned the young man to be in. He selected the very strongest point that could have been taken. He took the case of a son who was bereaved, and was apparently seeking to manifest reverently the noblest feelings of his nature toward his sire. But, in this case, for

the young man to go back and bury his father, was in fact to go back and bury himself. It was to throw himself into the open sepulchre.

To follow Christ is to grow up into him in all things. It is to reproduce in ourselves, under the divine inspiration, all those traits which make the character of Christ memorable through the ages, and which interpret through it, to us, the nature of God himself.

Now, this growth of Christian manliness, of piety, in you, lies before, and not behind. We are to find our duties, and our own best manhood, not by going back, but by going forward. It is right for us to look back upon our life, and upon all things of interest which lie behind us, for the sake of preparing ourselves the better to advance ; but it is not right for us to look back upon them, for the sake of excusing ourselves from advancing. We have a right to look back upon sorrows and upon joys, if they influence us to go forward ; but if they are so many anchors which hold us stationary in the past or in the present, then they are evil. It is right for us to look back, if we can thus find inspiration to honor and enterprise and courage ; but not, if looking back fills us with discontent, and discouragement, and fear, and suffering. The past is not to be a source of distress and torment to men. Their true life lies before them ; and considerations of duty to God and to themselves, as well as considerations of rectitude and honor, should keep men's eyes looking forward, and their steps moving onward. There is a past that men may use, which is full of sweetness and of love, to which we may resort with profit. But there is a place in the past where we may bury that which we can no longer use to advantage. The past may become a Gehenna, an Aceldama ; full of perishing things, full of ghastly bones. Such a past no man has a right to cherish. No man has a right to make of his past life a stumbling-block, an obstruction in the way of his going forward to a new and a higher life. Every man's business, no matter what he has gone through, no matter what or where he is, and no matter what he has suffered or done, is to press forward. Even to the thief upon the cross, the way forward was the right way. Paradise lies not behind any man, but before every man.

We shall now employ this view as a rule of criticism by which to judge all prevailing practices that are mischievous, whether regarded as Christian or merely manly—premising that no man has made such a use of the past as he ought to have done, and that every man has been a creature of weakness. Every man has had sins that oppressed him. Every man has had inexperience through which he has been obliged to make experiments. Every man has had his

battle with temptations. Every man has had his scars. Every man has had a past, out of which, if he will, he can draw hideous spectres that shall annoy his pride, distress his conscience, and blur the vision of his moral sense. And since every man has such a past, the question is, how it is best for him to use it.

First, it is not wise for a man, in using the past, to dwell perpetually upon his own general sinfulness. If such a looking back be sincere and genuine ; if a man dwell on the fact that he is a sinner in such a way that, like a bow, it shoots him in the other direction, then he is making a normal and wholesome use of the retrospect of his sinfulness ; but if a man thinks he is to look through the scenes of his youth, his early manhood, and his later life, and coin and mold them, and take the influence that comes from them as a means of grace—if he does it sincerely, he does it most mischievously. When a man has done wrong and has been sorry for it, it should drift back, go behind, sink down, and be forgotten.

Still worse is it, if a man feels it to be his duty to look back, and falls into a kind of conventional, liturgical recitation of his sins, so that every testimony of truth, every prayer, every speech that he makes among God's people, is a perpetual confession—a sort of endless recounting of past transgressions. For when he who is a child of God, having committed sin, has repented of it, he has slain it. The old sins of Christian men—where are they ? Not in the sea ; not in the soil ; not upon the earth ; not in the air ; not in heaven ; not with God himself, who says, “I will remember them no more forever.” And that which God has forgotten, who ought to remember ? Old stumblings, old mistakes, old wrongs—it is for them to go down to annihilation. Why should a man be fumbling in the graveyard of his own experience, to raise up spectres of thought and memory from them ? As if that would make him better ! As if he would be the better now for raking up the sins of his youth ! Everybody knows you sinned in youth. Everybody knows that no man lives who does not sin. The question is, what shall you do with your past sins ? Look at them, if you please, long enough to direct your future course by them, but then let them go. We should look forward, for the most part : for that which lies before us is full of hope ; and hope is wholesome ; it is sweet ; it is healthy. We are saved by hope. It is, as it were, the food of the soul, on which true manhood grows.

What if a man should do by his body as many think it a duty to do by their souls ? Men try to keep in mind their sinfulness, as though that were necessary to make them humble before men ; but suppose a man should preserve the parings of his finger-nails, the clip-

pings of his hair, the excretions of his whole body, in order to live according to the laws of nature in a wholesome way? Who could tolerate such an absurdity? Men would revolt at it. And shall men do by their souls what they would not do by their bodies? Wrongs done—let them go. Drown the past. Walk not with gibbering ghosts: they are bad company. Do not let them haunt your life.

Morbid regrets, whether moral, social, or physical, are not to be cherished. I think the hardest lot a man has to bear is that of being born malformed. I think there are no persons who deserve so much sympathy, and who get so little, as those who, through life, are obliged to wear a body that calls forth the derision, or at least the pity, of all who come near them. It is not an ungrateful thing to have the eyes of other persons turned upon you, if you are in health and strength; there is something kindly even in the look of strangers, under such circumstances: but where a man is malformed, and where the deformity is one that cannot be hidden, the mortification and suffering which he undergoes are very great, and the effect on his disposition is very bad. He has an uncommonly good moral temperament, and is sound in his manhood, who can come up from childhood with a malformation of his body, and not be perverted in his moral sense by the consciousness that people look upon him as one on whom God has set a mark of misfortune.

Oftentimes the same takes place where persons are made exceedingly feeble by disease; where they early lose the power which belongs to common manhood.

Now, under all these circumstances, it is the duty of every one, not to look back, and say, "If I had had such a chance as you had, it would have been different; if the door of life had opened to me as it did to you, I should have got along well enough. You can afford to give me good advice, because you are sound of foot, strong of limb, and have known nothing of what it was to suffer from an evil look or from derision. In childhood, I stood at the outer edge of pleasure, obliged to look on wistfully. In the sports of my companions I could bear no part. I had no conscious strength or agility. To me was accorded no place in the field of skill. I was out of the battle before I was in it. I was kept in life without my consent. It is easy for you to tell me that it is not best to be mourning over these things." Why must a man have a fever, in order to be fit to take care of you, when you have a fever? Is it not the man that is well that can give advice to those that are sick? And do not the words of our Saviour apply to you when he says,

“Who of you, by taking thought, can add one cubit unto his stature?” It is very troublesome and painful, no doubt, to be born a dwarf; but shall a man that is born a dwarf whine and cry? Will that make him grow? Is there rain in tears that will make the root vigorous, and its branches fructify? You are what you are in the order of God’s providence, nor can repentance and regrets change the past; and there is but one thing for you to do: forget that which is behind, and think of that which is before. Look forward. Your life lies ahead. And you cannot tell by the shell what the pearl is. If we were to judge of the contents of the oyster only by the rude, rough exterior, who would ever think of looking inside of it for exquisite pearls? A man may be deformed; he may be much reduced by sickness; he may have lost his career in this life; but, in the long run, that may not be so great a misfortune as you think. You do not know what the whole problem of life is for which God sent you into the world. Every man bears in himself some outline. Some structure is to be wrought out in him. When our life that is hid with Christ in God shall appear, there will be developed some reason why every man was made as he was; and that reason will shine with eternal glory and praise. It doth not yet appear what we shall be. The poorest, the lamest, the most halting ones, to whom it seems as if their senses had been bombarded and battered, have God with them. Their life lies in the future, and it is better that they should be looking forward than backward. It is better that they should look above and beyond pains, and sorrows, and restrictions, and limitations.

The same is true of those regrets which many persons indulge in for lost opportunities in life. “If I had known in my childhood,” says one, “what I know now, I should not have neglected industry and application to study. I had a chance of becoming a man, but in my heedlessness I let it go by; and now I find no place for repentance, though I seek it with tears.” I hear a man say, “I might have been an Agassiz; I might have been a scholar; my father wanted me to go to school; but I would not. I would give all I am worth in the world, if I had been through college.” Well, I should think that feeling might be cured by looking at folks who have been through college! And yet there are men who, all their life long, with all their power and various success, cannot get over the feeling, “I had no education when I was a boy; I had the opportunity of becoming almost anything I might choose; I was so foolish as not to improve it, and now I am suffering the consequences of my neglect.” And what are you going to do about

it? Can you enter the second time into your mother's womb, and start life over again? Suppose you are sorry every day, and suppose you harass and torment yourself continually, will it make any difference? Let the past alone. You have been born once; you have had one childhood; you have peopled your life with mistakes; you have come to late or middle manhood, as the case may be; and why go back? Bury the dead. Let them go.

"Ah! if I had only been favored as I see others to have been, I should now be an artist, I should be a scholar, I should be a publicist, instead of toiling here in this stithy." Nay, this is treason against one's own manhood and dignity, as well as against the providence of God. The past cannot be helped. Therefore do not go back to it.

A man in the middle of the ocean upon a raft of timber may have some reasons for regret; but there is only one manly thing for him to do, and that is to endure, and seek and labor for safety or rescue. It is not wise for him to refuse to work, saying, "Oh, if I only had a boat instead of a raft!" There are others who are floating on the sea, having put out in a boat; and the water is rough, and they are half paralyzed with fear; and they say, "Oh, that we were in a ship!" There are others who are on a ship, and it is leaking, and in danger of foundering; and they say, "Oh, if, instead of being on this foul, villainous ship, we were only in a staunch steamship!" Now, manliness requires, when you are on the sea, and in danger, no matter what your vessel may be, that you should make for the land, or to the nearest point of safety. Do not whine or cry because you are not on something better. Wherever you are in life, make the best of your circumstances. Remember that you have all the time that there is in the direction of eternity. If you have lost all there is in this world, then there is nothing left you but death and the graveyard, so far as this life is concerned; but stand in your place, hopeful and cheerful, and say, "I will make the best of the grace of God. I will not throw that away, because I have thrown away everything else."

Still more foolish and culpable are the regrets of men for lost property. How many there are who will tell you, when they ask your sympathy and succor, "I have not always been so: I have seen better days!" Well, I would not tell of it, even if it is true. It seems to me a man ought to have manhood enough to walk in later life where he began to walk in the beginning of life. Persons ought not to cry on account of their victuals and clothes. A man ought to have enough in Christ Jesus and in immortality to make him willing to wait until God shall take him to heaven. I never

saw anybody so poor that he did not bid fair to live till he died ; and dying is the best part of life, to one who knows how to live worthily.

Here you feed on disappointments, and sighs, and groans, and transitory pleasures, and delusive expectations, and conscious weaknesses ; and you stumble and fall. Life is full of troubles ; and if you want to make them of use to you, think of them as designed for your good ; and say, " I will bear them ; and, whatever else may happen, nothing can take away from me the coronation of death." Sooner or later, your career in this world will come to an end. Somehow you will get through the present life. I never saw a man that did not steer for the grave ; and you will find it at last. Having that certainty before you, why should you moan and whine over your lot ? Why should you complain that you have not the comforts that you once had ?

I do not undervalue wealth ; I hold it to be, under divine providence, a great economic power for civilizing nations. It is possible for individuals in communities where wealth is developed, to be virtuous and manly and noble, without being rich ; but, in the progress of nations at large, it is not possible for communities to come into a state of Christian piety without industry, and frugality, and thrift, and well-administered wealth. Where men are living in such communities as ours, wealth is not necessary to manhood and virtue ; and if a man has had wealth, and lost it, why should he go about bemoaning his loss, thus showing that he has lost his manhood as well as his money ; or, that there was nothing to him but money ? You are often surprised that so much money can hang on so small a core. One sometimes doubts the doctrine of immortality, because, when some men's property is taken away, there is so little left. Why should men degrade themselves at the loss of property when they live under the light of revelation, and have the whole world's experience teaching them that a man can be manly without this external adjunct ? Why should not a man, who has had the development and culture of wealth, be manly enough to show the world that he can be poor and yet contented, and that what there seemed to be of him was not artificial, but genuine ?

There are men that I could mention by the score, yea, by the hundred, who, if you were to strip them of their money, of their honors, and of their influence, would not be diminished a whit, but would stand with as much intrinsic power as they had before, because that power lay in their essential manhood. Do you suppose Chief Justice Marshall would have been less a man, if his chief-justiceship had been taken away from him ? Do you suppose John

Milton, when he was poor, blind, and cast out of office, was less a giant than he was before? It made no difference with Shakespeare whether he had a house, or a theater, or any other outward thing. His nature was in himself. God put that into him which made him manly and noble; and he was independent of external conditions.

Many persons mourn that they have lost that wealth which they never had, but which they expected to have—and this is a touch of folly greater than the foregoing. That venture which was to bring them in a hundred thousand dollars miscarried; they lost what they expected to have; and they go around grieving over their loss. A man says, “I lost a hundred thousand dollars on such a day.” “How was that?” asks the listener. “I was as sure of it as though I had it in my hand; and if it had not been for a mean, contemptible fellow who went back on me, I should have had it; but now it is gone.” How many men dabble in “pools,” thinking to get rich, until something upsets the pool, and they find themselves floundering, and of no more value than so many tadpoles, and then mourn, and say that they have lost, because they failed to get what they meant to have! A man sat on the steps of a hotel in Chicago, the other day, with a friend of mine. They were looking over the great waste. The man seemed unconscious of my friend’s presence, for a time, and was sighing, sighing. By-and-by his grief was so great that he had to get relief; and he said, “I once owned nearly twenty acres of land right in there. Like a fool, I sold it. If I had kept it until now, I should have been worth millions of dollars!” So men are mourning over lost wealth, whether they really once owned houses and lands, or whether they had the prospect of getting them, and failed to get them. Is there anything baser than for a man to torment his life, destroy his usefulness, and make everybody around him miserable, by whining because he has lost wealth that he actually possessed, or wealth that he has merely shaken hands with?

Stop looking into the past. Bury out of sight those corpses that stink, and forget them. What if your whole fortune has been taken from you? Do not stand and repine, but go to work and repair the loss. What if you have had everything cut off? Do not give up, and say, “I can never again be where I was.” You can be where you are; and your business is to make the best of your present circumstances. You have love and sympathy, and God and immortality, left. The loss of property does not touch any of these things. The vicissitudes of wealth cannot reach the inward manhood. As, though the storm may rage over the mountain, men

are sheltered and protected in the cave on its side ; so, there ought to be in every man's soul a place where, though everything is desolated without, he can retreat, and rest.

There is mourning, too, over lost pleasures. Many persons whine, and moan, and look back to better days and to old joys. We never think with sadness of the lost flowers of the summer that is gone. We never, standing and shivering in January and February, cry because the warm season, with its treasures, has passed away. We always say, "The months are speeding, and soon there will be another spring and another summer as bountiful as the old ones." But men talk foolishly about their pleasures, and mourn over them when they are lost, as if they had met with a great misfortune.

I can imagine one in shabby raiment going past a house of festivity, where are the light of joy and the sound of dancing, and saying to herself, "I was once courted and sought at just such places as that ; but now things are changed, and this is a dark world to me." The trouble with you is, not that you have lost your pleasure, but that you have lost yourself ; and the latter loss is much greater and more to be deplored than the former. If pleasures are gone, and mourning follows, it shows that there is a lack in the manhood or womanhood. Take such good as God gives you, and rejoice in it, in the days of your youth or manhood ; but do not give way to repining, nor bring your soul into bondage to any such thing. He only is a man, and she only is a woman, who are adequate to the circumstances in which God's providence puts them. What would you think if our Government should say to Sheridan, "Go out from Chicago to where the Modocs are," and he should go, but should weep all the way across the plains, saying, "This is very different fare, boys, from that which we have been accustomed to. Where we were, we lived well, we had everything that was good ; but here we have to eat hard-tack and dry meat. Our food does not compare very well with that which we used to get at Delmonico's in New York, does it?" What would you think of a man who, when sent off on a mission of great responsibility, should bemoan the lack of the comforts which he has left behind ? I would not breathe the breath of scorn upon innocent pleasures and enjoyments when God sends them to you ; but I do scorn and rebuke those who, when they see pleasures go from them, regret and repine. Let the dead be buried. When they are gone, let them alone.

But suppose pleasures have gone by reason of the wastes of dissipation ? Suppose they have gone by reason of outworn age ?

Suppose the eye sees no more except men as trees walking? Suppose the ear refuses to bring back sweet sounds? Suppose pains rack the flesh and bones? And suppose a man stands in the midst of life, and says, "I that used to be so full of manhood, what am I?" Oh, are you so small, are you so weak, are you so unmanly, as to suppose that this is all there is of you—the mere competence to enjoy the things which come by the senses? Has life, that school in which you have been receiving your education, done nothing more for you than to make you a puling, discontented, crying old man?

More worthy, yet not altogether commendable, are the same retrospects in the realm of friendship. There is no loss so touching and so deep as that which we feel when we bury our loved ones. Grief is sacred then. But no grief has the right of immortality. That ground belongs to joy, to hope, to faith. It has no right to long life. No person has a right to go back perpetually, and keep open the wounds which God would heal, and to enfeeble himself when he should grow strong by suffering. Hear the voice of him "who, for the joy that was set before him, endured the cross, despising the shame." "No affliction," says he by the voice of his servant, "for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous; nevertheless, afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them that are exercised thereby." Nobody has a right to sit down by the grave and give himself to it as a sanctuary. No person has a right to strike darkness through all the chambers of memory.

Is there any grief more touching than that which is filled with a consciousness of unfulfilled duty? "Alas! if I had known that my girl, just blossoming into life, was to be taken from me, how much more would I have done for her!" "Ah! if I had known that my companion, between whom and me came sunshine and showers, was to leave me forever, would I ever have come into her presence with a moody and scowling brow? Would I ever have been unreasonable in my conduct toward her? Would I have demanded so much service, and been willing to render so little? Would I not have been more vigilant to fulfill my whole duty toward her? But now she is gone, and I cannot recall her. The past is all dark and bitter to me." Well, these are most wholesome and salutary reflections, but only on one ground—namely, that they bring forth the fruit of fidelity to those who have been spared to you. Waste not your time or your strength in vain regrets over those who are gone. Wound not your heart with a poisoned dagger, because you have unfulfilled duties of affection in the past;

but look forward, and see to it that you fulfill all like duties in the future. Those who are separated widely apart—shall not they yet stand together again, and greet each other with smiles of love that shall never die out from the face ?

So we often pine for the lost because, if we had known, as nobody could know beforehand, what experience has taught us, we might have kept them. “If I had known that that ride would have brought my child home fevered and ready to die, would I have taken it ?” “If I had understood the complaint from which the child was suffering, and had known what a critical state it was in, would I have said to it, ‘Be still ! be still ! go and lie down, and you will feel better ?’” “If I had dreamed that such and such remedies, of such a school, would have such an effect, and lead to the grave, would I have used them ? If I had heeded so-and-so’s advice, I might have had my child now.” Thus persons torment themselves with vain regrets in regard to those who have gone from them. They make grief heavier than it needs to be, and render it unprofitable. They prevent themselves from looking into the future with chastened eye and heart, and with a more hopeful disposition.

Let the dead bury their dead ! Let the past go ! Press forward to the future ! Lift up your head ! I see many plants that, in summer, when the storm is out, catch drops of rain, and, not knowing how to shed them, are weighed down almost to the ground. And when the storm is gone, they shake themselves ; and, little by little, they stretch themselves up again ; and the next day they stand, with all their leaves unfolded once more, fragrant and beautiful, as if refreshed, washed, and made strong. Men may, in troubles—especially the worst ones—be bowed down ; but nobody should lie prostrate, as if torn up by the roots. For that, the Word of God was not given to you. For that, the promise of Christ and the visitation of the Holy Ghost were not given to you. For that, the future was not unrolled. You are a child of God, for whom he has provided grace to help in time of need. When you are afflicted, he is nearer to you than at any other time. Be worthy of this Friend and Sympathizer and Benefactor.

I will detain you further, only to speak of the mournings and repentances of those who have finished life. Sad is the picture which we too often see in the weakness of age. How many dreary old men and complaining old women there are who sit in the house hold, looking back, and finding fault with everything that is present and everything that has been ! How many persons there

are who thus make themselves a burden ! One of the things for which I pray devoutly is, that my life may be terminated when I am in full strength, suddenly, so that I need not leak out, drop by drop, and become a burden on the hands of others, and fill the house with discontent, and cease to love the faces of children because they make a noise, and no longer have affinity for any of the sweet things that are going on in the family. To become changed thus, even though change is in accordance with nature, and is inevitable, is dreadful to me as purgatory—if there is such a thing, as I devoutly believe there is, because I have seen it. When a man that used to be prompt, and vigorous, and clear, and fruitful, and companionable, and noble in all the offices of life, has dwindled and dwindled, till his voice becomes like the voice of winds piping through cracks and crevices—a mourning, wailing sound, without joy and without sweetness—till you look away from him to think of him, till you have to go back from what he is to what he was, in order to rightly estimate him, then he is to be pitied. God deliver me from going through such a purgatory. But if it comes to me, may I be prepared for it ; and may you be prepared for it, if it comes to you.

If, as old age approaches, your disposition is sweetened and mellowed, if your nature is ripened, if your faith is strengthened, and if disinterested kindness is developed in you, happy will it be for you ; but if not, your state will be pitiable. For what can be more wretched than to see a man standing on the verge of this life and looking back into the world from which he is happily escaping, and holding out trembling hands which can grasp nothing, without realizing or discerning any of the blessings which beckon him on to the heaven above ? I can imagine an owl sitting between night and morning, and hooting, and singing a pæan to darkness, and mourning that the sun is driving away the stars, and that the woods are being made uncongenial to him by the sweet voices of the birds of the day ; but who can conceive how a man can stand in the twilight of immortality, and hoot and hoot, and desire to live longer, as though there was nothing beyond—no light, no hope, no certainty of a glorified manhood ?

What are all the things which men bear here but mere dust on the car that is speeding them to their bridal ? What are all the things that men have here but wings that waft them on their way ? Then spread your sails, that they may carry you over your voyage. There is to every one who is a man in Christ Jesus a manhood ever rolling toward the future. Let no man fall back to the graceless task of perpetually exhuming what ought to remain buried. May

you be delivered from a memory which is but a graveyard of desires that continually rise and walk, day and night, with gibberings, as airy ghosts. The enfranchisement of Christ; the liberty of the sons of God; the hope of immortality; the certainty of heaven; the sonship; the crown; the palm; the harp; the song; the youth that never dims; the treasures that never waste; the joys that spring again as you pluck them,—these things lie over against you.

Then let the past go! Let the dead bury their dead! Live! Ye are the children of light, and love, and hope, and glory.

PRAYER BEFORE THE SERMON.

WE rejoice, almighty God, our Father, that thou dost not put far from thee those that are less than thyself, and that are imperfect, that are sinful. If thou didst, who from among the children of men could draw near to thee? For all of us are weak; all of us are imperfect; all of us have sinned against light and against knowledge, in every part and in every faculty. We have sought selfish ends. We have sought the present, and not the future. We have been negligent of all the obligations of love and gratitude. We have fulfilled our own ways, and not sought to glorify Him from whom we spring, and to whom we are to go again. We rejoice that thou art not a man—that thou art God; and by all that there is in thee of light, our darkness shall be illumined. All that there is in thee of goodness shall be made over to us, and shall be an education to us in goodness. Thou art pure, and hast taught us the lesson of purity, whose office throughout the universe is to lift things up to itself, and cleanse them.

And now, O Lord, we believe that it is the work of thy whole administration and government to bring light out of darkness, joy out of sorrow, and to rear things from insignificance to grandeur and glory. We believe that thou art sowing everywhere the seeds of eternal life; and that where thou art sowing, there thou art reaping. All earth is, and time and the endless ages of eternity shall be, filled with thy beneficence.

We desire, O Lord our God, to lift ourselves up into the consciousness of thy being, and of our exceeding strength and gladness in thee. For that which we could not learn from nature, thou hast spoken. Against our thought, in spite of our surprise, we cannot but believe thy word which thou hast ratified in thy Son. We are thy children. In thy soul paternity is not as it is in ours, truckling, and weak, and partial, and faint with imperfection, and even with selfishness. In thee, Fatherhood moves in infiniteness and majesty and glory. Thou art long-suffering. Thou art gracious. Thou art full of compassion. Rather than that any should die, thou didst give thine own self unto death. Rather than that suffering should take hold upon immortality, thou didst give thy Son to die for the world. Bring us into the faith of this paternity of God, that we may know what our strength is, and what are the riches of his grace toward those who believe in him. Why should the children of a King go mourning all their days? Why should any complain of weakness to whom is vouchsafed the whole realm of divine power? Who is so poor that for him the day doth not come with arms full of bounty? Who is so poor that for him the seasons do not pour forth their unlimited supplies? Who is so rich that death, his benefactor, is not calling to him? Who is so far from thee, and so much neglected, that the eternal

spheres do not wait for him? Are not *Chine* angels, are not ministering spirits, sent forth to minister to them that are heirs of salvation? How full of them must be the very air which we breathe? How round about us is their breath and their sacred touch? How is all the universe alive and sentient with the thought and feeling of the love of Him who is infinite and universal? And why are we among the dregs? Why are we outcast? Why are we sad? Whether we gain or lose, whether the world smiles or scowls, whether we are in sickness or in health, in adversity or in prosperity, have we not Thee? Is not the fair harbor of heaven open to us? Is there any gale blowing across the way of life that does not carry us thitherward? And what is there to weep over in life, if we have immortality—if the life to come is ours? What is there that we cannot part with, if the taking it be but a way in which thou dost communicate thine own self unto us? We pray that we may have more faith, more trust in God. We pray that we may be delivered from all that downward looking and backward looking by which men seek among the dead for the inspiration of life. May we look up, and set our hearts on things above—so far above, that no shaft can reach to disturb our settled peace. At last may we learn how to dwell where thou dost brood thine own. And though there be to us no such ladder as that which thy servant beheld, with angels descending and ascending upon it, there is a better sight to us, who see heaven opening, and Christ sitting at the right hand of God. With no mediation, with nothing intermediate, to us is the heaven opened; to us is there commerce with thyself. Thou art thinking of us. Thy hand is upon us. Thou art watching over us. Thy wings are round about us. Why, then, should we not rejoice in the Lord, and rejoice always?

We beseech of thee that we may have courage, and a child-like faith, and gladness which shall break out into hymns and songs perpetually. May we walk among men, not ignorant that we have their weakness, not unconscious that we, like them, are evil, and are easily crushed under temptation; and yet, may we walk as those whom God loves, and on whom he looks, and whom he has raised up, so that, though we are cast down, we shall feel that we are not destroyed. May we be as children of light, with faces evermore lifted up to take the beams of the orient as they come from thee.

We pray that thou wilt bless those that are striving to live thus. If there are those who are not endeavoring so to live, may they be brought to know their better manhood. May they learn that this life is not sufficient for them. May they see that it is not worth the having if it is all. May they believe in that nobler manhood which reaches beyond the present, and takes hold of the future. May they know that riches await them above. Grant that they may be led to form purposes of effort and faith in the divine service. May those who are making their first essay in the heavenly life be strengthened against all discouragement. Though they may stumble, and wander, and backslide, though they may often find themselves overmatched by adversaries, yet, may they gird up their loins, and press forward, knowing that he who is the Captain of their salvation hath slain death, and that sin shall be slain in them.

Grant, we beseech thee, thy blessing and presence to those who have tasted of thy love, who know somewhat of the graciousness of their Saviour, and who have learned where to find refuge in distress. Still may thy banner of love be over them. Let the communications of the Holy Ghost bring them peace and gladness.

We pray, O Lord our God, that thou wilt grant that we may know how to bear one another's burdens, and overlook one another's faults, and walk with meekness and gentleness among men. May we know how to bear the name of Christ with us so that men shall know something of what he is, and

of what is in us. Forbid that we should mis-spell that sacred name, or cast upon it any disgrace. May we walk guided by thy spirit, lifted up into a serener and purer atmosphere, and more and more ennobled by the presence of God, unto the very end.

Remember our households. Remember our children, and their children. Remember our dear friends. Remember all those with whom we have labored, in every field. Remember the companions of our boyhood and early travel. Remember all those who are far from us upon the sea, and in distant lands, and in the wilderness. Remember all those, everywhere, who are in peril. We pray that thou wilt grant the divine presence, and thy salvation, to them all.

Bless the land in which we dwell. We pray that its institutions may be more and more favorable to eternal justice. Bless the efforts which are being made on every hand to spread intelligence. And unite with the diffusion of knowledge the growth of virtue and purity.

We pray, not for our own land alone, which has been so signally blest, but for all the nations of the earth. May they be advanced in knowledge, and in that light which shall exorcise superstition and ignorance, and drive it from their midst. At last, may all men, everywhere, be so strong that they cannot be oppressed; so that despotism shall die, and that every one of thy creatures shall stand in that light and liberty wherewith Christ doth make men free. Let thy kingdom come and let thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

We ask it for Christ Jesus' sake. *Amen.*

PRAYER AFTER THE SERMON.

OUR Father, we beseech of thee that thou wilt bless the word which we have spoken. May it be a cheer to all of us. Grant that we may take hold of hands with a common purpose to be good; to do good; to help one another; to obstruct the way of none; to raise the low; to heal the sick; to strengthen the weak; to show the way to those that are erring; to do by all men as thou art doing by us. For if thou wert to look upon us as we look upon our fellow men who have offended us, who of us could stand for an hour? But what mercy hast thou shown us! How hast thou blessed us in every way! How hast thou been as a Father to us! How hast thou helped us to become worthy children, and perfect, as our Father in heaven is perfect, who maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust. And being thus richly blessed, may we so live as to be a blessing to those around us. And, looking forward, and waiting for the Lord Jesus Christ, he shall see us afar off; discerning us through the shades of death, he shall recognize us; and running to meet us, he shall fall on our neck, and bless us, as we come to our Father's house. Even so, Lord Jesus, come quickly. And to the Father, the Son and the Spirit shall be the praise, evermore. *Amen.*

PLYMOUTH PULPIT.

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